

Remarks of Denise Rose  
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Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee & Education Committee  
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Good afternoon, members of the Program Review & Investigations Committee and Education Committee. My name is Denise Rose. I'm a teacher in Glastonbury, and I'm here to comment on Raised Bill 329 and Raised Bill 330, pertaining to the BEST program recommendations for mentoring.

The present mentoring program in our schools is left to the individual school system to design and implement. If you are a fortunate beginning teacher, a mentor is provided during your first year of teaching. With luck, the mentor is in the same grade level. During this first year, the mentoring process can include support with lesson design, classroom management, differentiating instruction and communication with parents. The challenge is finding the time it takes to assist a beginning teacher while planning and teaching your own students. Having a shared planning period once a day of 30-45 minutes, is currently the "ideal" collaboration time. However, one 45 minute common planning time even five days a week is not enough. When a new 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher joined my team, we met each day for an hour before school, during our planning time and for at least an hour after school almost every day. In the summer we collaborated on units we wished to improve for the following school year. The time we took to meet beyond the common planning period allowed us to discuss not only what to teach, but the results of those lessons. In this way we could plan the next lessons to meet the needs of our students.

Imagine planning all you do each day in 45 minutes. To be an effective mentor requires far more time and interaction with a beginning teacher. All other professions provide mentors who guide new employees. I was at Panera during the February break. There at the cash register was a trainer, whose badge indicated training was her job, working side by side with a new employee. In education we give a beginning teacher a classroom key and hope for the best.

During the second year of teaching, the beginning teacher must complete the BEST portfolio. The portfolio causes the mentoring to change from refining teaching skills to passing the portfolio and all its many requirements. No longer can you discuss day to day classroom activities and student needs because the emphasis has switched to meeting the lesson design requirements of the portfolio and the writing of the numerous reflection pieces. The actions of the beginning teacher and mentor now focus on the successful completion of a product rather than refining the beginning teacher's ability to design and implement lessons containing inquiry.

This switch to the completion of the portfolio product requires every meeting to examine the details of the portfolio expectations. Every teacher I have mentored through this process, and I am presently working with my thirteenth teacher, describes how the portfolio has consumed all their energy and intent. No longer can the beginning teacher work on the improvement or development of a unit because the time needed to produce the portfolio is a daily pull of the teacher's time and focus. In fact, in my school, the teachers on the beginning teacher's team do the planning and gathering of materials for the beginning teacher's daily lessons. The mentor and beginning teacher meet before and after school and on weekends to work on the portfolio.

This is not what mentoring was designed to do or accomplish. A valid mentoring program is a one to one relationship between the experienced teacher and beginning teacher. Together they address the needs of the beginning teacher by discussing, planning and reflecting on lessons. The mentoring teacher offers only what an experienced teacher can: effective teaching strategies, management techniques and emotional support. Mentor teachers need to participate in the beginning teacher's classroom by modeling lessons, team teaching and observing the beginning teacher so they can reflect on the strengths and the strategies the beginning teacher wishes to improve.

Teaching is a complex task of constant interactions requiring numerous decisions. Beginning teachers can easily become overwhelmed with teaching responsibilities when no one is there to guide and provide on the job training. No matter how extensive the teaching preparation program, everyone needs a mentor to support

those first years of teaching. One beginning teacher I worked with said, "You do everything from being the CEO to the guy who gets the coffee in a classroom."

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with this image. As a beginning teacher tomorrow you will walk into a room filled with desks, 22-28 children all of the same age will arrive and you will, for the next six hours, engage them in activities that foster their intellectual, emotional, physical and social development. You will have had 45 minutes to ask questions, gather any ideas, materials and management strategies from your mentor. The remainder of the day, you are on your own to do the job of teaching. Right now, that is considered the ideal mentoring program. I doubt anyone would feel ready to meet the daily challenges of teaching students under this ideal system. We have an opportunity as the BEST portfolio is reviewed to improve the mentoring program. We need to support and encourage these new teachers with mentors who are given the time to work closely with their beginning teacher. Beginning teachers deserve to have mentors who help them realize teaching is the right career and honorable profession.

